



Sen. Joe Zarelli
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Committee Assignments

Capital Budget (Chair)
Ways & Means (Vice Chair)
Education (Vice Chair)
Economic Development
(Vice Chair)
Financial Services, Insurance
& Housing

18th Leg. District Day

Thursday, April 3, from 10 a.m.
to 2 p.m. Meet at the Tour Tent
in the Flag Circle at 10:00 a.m.
A tour of the Capitol campus and
lunch with your legislators is
included. Call my office in
Olympia for more details.

Town Halls-Sat. March 22nd

Meet with legislators from the
17th & 18th Districts regarding the
2003 Legislative Session, issues
or comments.

10 am to 11:30 pm
Washougal Citizen's Center
1681 'C' Street
Washougal

12:00 noon to 1:30 pm
Hockinson Middle School
15916 NE 182nd Ave.
Brush Prairie

2:30 pm to 4:00 pm
Ridgefield High School Library
2630 S. Hillhurst Rd.
Ridgefield

Sen. Joe Zarelli's

UPDATE FROM OLYMPIA

3/17/03

Dear Friends,

So much has happened in the week since I last sent you an update. I am going to title this update as "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly."

THE GOOD: I am encouraged by a piece of legislation that passed the Senate last week – **Senate Bill 5521**. This bill allows insurance carriers to tailor their plans to the needs of individual small businesses in Washington state.

As many of you know, mandated benefits have driven health insurance costs for businesses through the roof. In 1963, there was one mandated benefit required of insurance sold in Washington. By 2002, there were more than 45. While large businesses may be able to absorb some of these costs, small businesses cannot. Often, a small business ends up canceling their employees' health plans simply because they can't afford the skyrocketing prices.

Senate Bill 5521 allows insurance companies to offer different health care packages based on customer needs, not state mandates. Under this bill, coverage would still include such basic services as optometrists, registered and advanced nurse practitioners, chemical dependency treatment, and mammograms. Employers would be able to purchase coverage for additional services if they so desired.

THE BAD: As many of you know, the Washington State Supreme Court declined to take a second look at its earlier "felony murder" ruling. Because of this, some 300 murder convictions are now in jeopardy. Prosecutors will now have to look at each individual case once again and either re-try the criminals or enter into negotiations with defense attorneys.

This was the reason I sponsored Senate Bill 5001 in the first place. SB 5001 was passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Locke. It clearly states that any felony – including assault – that ends in a death can be a precursor to a "felony murder" charge. But even with the Legislature's intent clearly stated in the new bill, the courts declined an appeal to look again at its decision.

THE UGLY: In a previous update, I told you about a proposal to place a tax (\$360 for the average RV) on RV owners in order to help fund state parks. I expressed to you and my colleagues that this was a bad idea – that we should not be balancing the state's parks budget on the backs of one group of users (who arguably use the parks less than most because of size restrictions).

I'm happy to report to you that this bill died in the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Those of you who contacted the chair of the committee should know that your voices were heard!

Sen. Joe Zarelli, 18th Legislative District